



# Maricopa County Animal Care & Control

## *CLIPPING & DECLAWING NAILS*

**Claws are indispensable** yet, in many households, a cat and his claws are separated via surgical declawing - all for the sake of the sofa. While all cats need to scratch, few need to be declawed. Most scratching needs can be met by providing suitable scratching and climbing surfaces. Sisal, fabric or rope posts at least three feet tall on sturdy bases fill the bill for many felines. If a cat doesn't quickly catch on to your preferred scratching areas, a few incentives may help. Low-cost corrugated cardboard scratch boxes anointed with catnip can draw cats away from previously preferred sofa arms, especially if those arms are temporarily covered with industrial-strength plastic sheeting. Adding strips of double-stick masking tape over the plastic increases its repulsiveness to the cat.

### **Solution in a snip**

If claws are kept blunt, a cat who strays from the scratching post from time to time will do little to no damage. You can get results without surgery by cutting the nails every two to three weeks. If you have never given a cat manicure, here are a few tips:

- If possible, start trimming the claws when your cat is young. As soon as kittens leave their littermates they are ready for nail trimming, so try to begin the routine no later than 10 to 12 weeks of age.
- Make it pleasant. Initially, do only a few nails at a time. Offer a food reward or scratch the cat in his favorite spots; then let him go.
- If you can't make it fun, make it fast. If you have an older cat who has already made up her mind against manicures, the mummy method may serve you best. Wrap a thick towel around her, leaving only the head exposed. Bring out one paw at a time, trimming the nails as swiftly as possible. Some caretakers find they can abandon the towel method if they schedule the manicure after a meal. If the cat is groggy from an after-dinner snooze she'll be more relaxed and easier to handle.
- Whatever your chosen technique, a pair of sharp, well-made cat nail scissors is the tool of choice. Other equipment can do the job, but a pair of scissors is the easiest to grasp when holding a squirming bundle of cat.

There's no need to fear your feline's nails. With a trimming regimen and the right equipment, you can happily co-exist with your cat's arsenal.

For more information on animal care, behavior or AC&C programs, contact (602) 506-PETS or visit [pets.maricopa.gov](http://pets.maricopa.gov)

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## **CLAWS ARE IMPORTANT TO A CAT**

A cat's remarkable grace and agility and its faultless sense of balance are due to a great extent to its retractable claws, which allow it to establish footing for walking, running, springing, climbing, or stretching. A cat's claws are also its best defense mechanism.

## **THE NEED TO SCRATCH**

When a cat scratches, it pulls off the old outer nail sheath and exposes sharp, smooth claws. Scratching is also a way of fulfilling the cat's strong instinctive need to mark its territory. Not only does a cat mark an object visibly by scratching it, but the scratching deposits secretions from glands in the feet that can be smelled by other cats. Scratching may also serve psychological and physiological needs by providing comfort and expression by kneading and allowing valuable stretching and foot-muscle exercise.

## **DECLAWING OPERATION**

The standard declawing procedure calls for the removal of the claw, and the last bone of the toe. The operation is usually performed on the front feet. It is actually an amputation comparable to the removal of the fingers of the human hand at the last knuckle. The cat experiences considerable pain in the recovery and healing process.

## **MEDICAL**

As with any surgical procedure that requires general anesthesia there are risks. Complications from anesthesia and/or the surgical procedure are possible.

## **BEHAVIORAL**

Although no definitive studies have been conducted on the effects of declawing,

owners and veterinarians have noticed personality changes in some declawed cats. Formerly lively, friendly animals have become withdrawn and introverted. Others, deprived of their primary form of defense, become nervous, fearful, and/or aggressive, often using their only remaining defense, their teeth. The constant state of stress caused by a feeling of defenselessness may make some declawed cats more prone to disease or to inappropriate elimination outside the litter box.

## **SAFETY**

A declawed cat must never be allowed outdoors; its ability to defend itself or escape from danger has been seriously impaired. Even indoors, a cat without claws faces dangers. One physical effect of declawing is a gradual weakening of the muscles of the legs, shoulders and back; balance is impaired. This, combined with the fact that despite its grace, a cat's surefootedness depends on its ability to grasp quickly with its claws, means that a declawed animal can more easily be injured in a fall.

## **INSTEAD OF DECLAWING**

### **INTRODUCE A SCRATCHING POST**

Buy or make a scratching post that is tall enough so the cat can stretch completely when scratching, and stable enough so it won't wobble when being used. It should be covered with a heavy, rough fiber like sisal or the back side of carpeting. Place the post in an accessible area. If you are trying to discourage the cat from scratching a particular piece of furniture, try placing the post in front of it, gradually moving the post aside as the cat begins to use it regularly.

# CLIPPING & DECLAWING NAILS

Train with a dual approach: discourage the cat from clawing the wrong things, encourage the cat to claw the right things. If the cat begins to scratch the furniture, call him by name, firmly telling him "no", and entice him over to the scratching post with a ribbon or fresh catnip. Each time he goes on his own, praise him, pet him, and spend a minute playing at the post. Make it a fun place to be. At the same time, the favorite furniture scratching area can be made less attractive by contact paper sticky side out (held on with upholstery screws). Put inexpensive cardboard scratch pads or posts near all the cat's favorite furniture.

## KEEP THE CAT'S NAILS TRIMMED

Cutting the nails regularly may help a cat from scratching the furniture, or at least reduce the damage done by his scratching. Get your kitten used to having his nails clipped while he's young. With an older cat, it may help to begin by handling the cat's feet under pleasurable circumstances. Then begin to introduce the clipping procedure by approaching the cat while he's relaxed or even napping and clip only a few nails per session. Praise your cat while you clip the nail and reward him with a treat.

If you're in doubt about what the proper nail length looks like, have your veterinarian trim the nails once. The only equipment necessary is a good pair of feline nail scissors. Before cutting, look for the pink "quick" that runs down the center of the nail. The scissors should cut about an eighth of an inch forward of the quick. Be extremely careful not to cut into the quick. If this happens, the cat will experience pain, and bleeding is likely. The bleeding

may stop without assistance, or you may need to hold a soft cloth on the nail or apply a little styptic powder. If you trim a small amount of nail on a regular basis, the quick will actually tend to recede.

## IS YOUR CAT SCRATCHING YOU ?

It is not uncommon to get scratched by your kitten or adolescent cat. It is during these growth stages that predatory play is at its highest. To avoid being seen as "prey" by your cat, have direct play onto such interactive toys as a catnip mouse on a string. If your cat is still pouncing on fingers and toes, reprimand it with a loud open-mouthed hiss or a puff of air blown in the face.